



Beauty and the gambling beast

By Jim Waters

Beauty isn't the only thing in the eye of the beholder. So, too, is the impact that expanded gambling would have in Kentucky.

Democratic gubernatorial candidate Steve Beshear's view of expanded gambling reminds me of a lonely lady who relies on an overdose of makeup rather than her ability to engage a man with the real "her."

Beshear just keeps laying it on thick about the gambling – while at the same time stressing the need for "new leadership" and "new ideas."

His is a well-worn canard which presumes that Frankfort needs more money to spend its way out of the troubles it has created.

Of course, it makes for an easier campaign. It requires neither new ideas nor new leadership. It's the people who have to change the constitution to expand gambling – a crap shoot, at best.

That's doesn't stop the One-Answer Man, though.

In fact, every time I hear Beshear talk, I'm tempted to ferret out his handlers to see if they've outsourced the campaign to a robot with a two-word vocabulary: "Expanded gaming."

If I was still wearing my reporter's hat, I expect an interview with the candidate would go something like this:

Reporter: So, Mr. Beshear, what's your plan for solving Kentucky's education crisis?

Steve Beshear: We need to increase funding. Gaming money would do that.

R: But that's not a new idea. You promised new ideas.

SB: Well, I mean expand gaming, which will raise \$500 million more a year.

R: But that's *not* a new idea. Politicians have said that for years. What about ideas that don't require additional money, like holding schools accountable for how much their students are improving academically and offering parents a choice of schools for their kids?

SB: Uh ... Uh.... Uh ...

R: Surely, with a half-billion in additional gambling money coming in, taxpayers could expect tax cuts boosting our economy and giving Kentuckians more control of their earnings, couldn't they? Which one would a Beshear administration cut first – the motor-vehicle tax? How about inheritance taxes? Perhaps you could

lead the charge against the hated Alternative Minimum Calculation? Which one will you tackle first, sir?

SB: Next question, son.

R: Your Web site suggests Kentuckians' lives can be improved primarily through expanded gambling. Yet the current budget is 25-percent larger than any spending plan offered during the Patton administration and contains a record level of debt. How much revenue is needed to adequately fund Frankfort's empire ... Hey where'd he go? I guess the interview's over.

By laying down a big bet on the prospects for expanded gambling, Beshear hands his opponent, incumbent Gov. Ernie Fletcher, a lifeline. Fletcher gets the opportunity to simply rail against gambling in lieu of offering any new ideas himself.

Innovative ideas aren't that hard to come by. Just look across the Ohio River into Indiana.

The Hoosier State leased its 157-mile long toll road to a private company, raising much-needed cash and reducing government's role in providing what the private sector was more than willing to do: maintain a road for a fee from drivers.

You mean, government doesn't have to fund the construction of – and provide the maintenance for – *every* road? Says who?

Says Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels.

When Daniels first proposed the toll-road project, bureaucrats snarled and poll numbers plunged. Those same polls shot back up when taxpayers realized that the private firm taking over the project would pay Indiana \$3.8 billion up-front to expand and improve the road.

That's a little more than seven years' worth of Beshear's expected gambling windfall.

Not only will the toll road be run by a private company with incentives to keep it well-traveled, but it will allow Indiana to build even more roads.

That *is* a new – and beautiful – idea Kentucky could adopt to fund badly needed roads and even bridges, at least in the eyes of this beholder.

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